



VETERANS OF FOREIGN WARS OF THE UNITED STATES

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## Memorial Day 2009

On Memorial Day, we commemorate and celebrate with humble reverence, the memory of absent comrades, all of whom epitomize and give true meaning to the words, “Valor, Sacrifice, Loyalty and Perseverance.” Yet, while we revere and cherish the memory of those who have come before, we are reminded to do everything within our power to support our soldiers, sailors, airmen, marines and coastguardsmen.

Equal Tribute needs to be given to all who are serving courageously around the world, during one of the most challenging periods in American history. At the same time, we pause to honor all generations of brave American service-people who have made the ultimate sacrifice for our nation.

Each year, in towns, cities and villages cross our great land, thankful citizens set aside a small portion of this day to publicly honor the best and noblest of us all, those who no longer walk among us. Memorial Day is a day of conflicting emotions for each of us; a blend of pride and mournfulness, gratitude and loss, and a deep abiding sense of patriotism.

On May 30, 1870, Maj. Gen. Logan said: “Let us then all unite in the solemn feelings of the hour, and tender with our flowers the warmest sympathies of our souls! Let us revive our patriotism and strengthen our loyalty by the example of the noble dead around us.”

As we measure the countless examples of ‘the noble dead’ and weigh the selfless devotion of our fallen and what they have given, we are obligated to look hard at who we are and aspire to become the best we can be.

Today, we share a common sorrow, but we also are united in our thanks to those who gave their last full measure of devotion to a cause much greater than themselves.

I am reminded of Joshua Lawrence Chamberlain, an American college professor who volunteered to serve with the Union Army during the civil war, attaining the ranks of Brigadier General and Brevet Major General. Chamberlain was awarded the Medal of Honor for gallantry at Gettysburg, and later commanded Union troops at Appomattox. In later life, he was Governor of Maine and was a faculty member and President of Bowdoin College. Chamberlain said on Memorial Day in 1884, "Those who will, may raise monuments of marble to perpetuate the fame of heroes. Those who will may build memorial halls to remind those who shall gather there in after times what manhood could do and dare for right, and what high examples of virtue and valor have gone before them. But let us make our offering to the ever-living soul. Let us build our benefactions in the ever-growing heart, that they shall live and rise and spread in blessing beyond our sight, beyond the ken of man and beyond the touch of time."

Regretfully, the sacrifices of our comrades are sometimes forgotten or disregarded, especially by those who have gained the most from it. History has proven that – If not for those we honor today – a heavy fist of tyranny and terror would still shackle and strangle many countries that are enjoying relatively recent freedom and democracy.

I think that it would be a good idea for those who take so much for granted to consider what alternatives would be available to them, if not for the selfless sacrifice of so many of our comrades.

That is why we must always be mindful to guard against revisionists' efforts to re-write the history of freedom's struggles. We must be ever-vigilant to guard against political correctness and expediency serving the parochial interests of those who would seek to ultimately diminish and lessen the heroism and the brave deeds of patriots of the past, as well as a new generation of patriots who have been put to the test in the war against terrorism.

As we speak of the present and the distant past it is up to us to make sure the legacy of our nation's fallen is passed on from this generation to the next and then on to all generations beyond. We must ensure that the youth of tomorrow have an awareness and understanding of whom it is they should likewise honor... and exactly why they should honor them!

As we maintain the memory and the deeds of our fallen throughout the coming years, we need to remember to care for those who returned from their service and their wars as well. Serving with equal dedication and valor, they deserve—and are entitled to—receive adequate and proper medical care and compensation for their wounds, injuries or illnesses connected to their military service.

After the support, the troop rallies... after the welcome home parades... and long after the flag-waving has died down, what happens next? Does our obligation to remember the sacrifice, service and accomplishments of our heroes end there?

Our responsibility and obligation to our veterans should not end when the last rally is over. Veterans deserve better than that. The defenders of this nation fulfilled their duty and obligation to us, and we have an equal duty to honor and fulfill our obligations to them.

Protecting and defending America's ideals and values should entitle them a chance to achieve the American dream too—one that includes employment, education and a home in which to live. They deserve not only our gratitude, but deserve to be treated with dignity and respect as well... Haven't they earned it?

To do anything less is to betray the memory and the sacrifice of our dead.

Let us leave here today knowing that our destiny as a free people is entirely up to us. Let every deed and act of each of our days, be guided by the memory of those who gave their lives for our future freedoms. And may their sacrifice continue to inspire us and fill us with hope all the days of our lives.

God Bless America.

